

Honor the deceased by honoring the living

I always liked the definition of coincidence as: “When God remains anonymous.” When things or people show up in our lives that make a difference in our lives, I like to think that they were brought by God. Allow me to offer an example.

During the Single-Again Conference at the Loyola University Graduate School in Columbia, I took some time alone in the meditation room. On the walls were various plaques with pictures of deceased faculty members. I recognized the name of Dr. Jack Compton. May God grant him and all the faithful departed eternal rest. Along with the pictures there were also quotes or sayings. Dr. Joan Saltman had the following printed on her plaque:

“Give what’s left of me to children and old folks.

And if you need to cry, cry for your brother or sister walking the street beside you.

And when you need me, put your arm around someone and give them what you need to give to me.

I want to leave you something, something better than words or sounds.

Look for me in the people I’ve known and loved.

And if you cannot give me away at least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind.

You can love me most by letting hands touch hands, by letting bodies touch bodies.

And by letting go of children that need to be free.

Love doesn’t die. People do.

So when all that’s left of me is love, give me away.”

I copied that down longhand on a manila folder I was carrying. A few weeks later, I

would use this reflection to close my homily at the funeral for Yeardley Love.

Grief is a process. We have to pass through the stages of sadness and anger and denial and bargaining and so on. We all live differently and therefore we all grieve differently.

What that little meditation offers, however, is a way to honor our grief. Honor the deceased by honoring the living!

I found the words of the meditation so similar to what Christ would say to us.

“Look for me in the people I’ve known and loved.” The way to see God today is to see God in the lives of those who truly live the Good News by letting the Spirit of God live through them. We are the temples of God’s Spirit. The challenge is for others to see God by seeing us.

We want to turn our crying for the deceased into compassion for the living.

We want to be people who have Christ not just living in our minds, but living in our eyes and our actions.

We cannot free our loved one from the power of death, but we can work to free others from the forces of political oppression and fear and guilt and sin.

We honor our deceased loved one by never taking any moment of life for granted. We want to affirm and touch love.

At some point, all of our mortal bodies will fade away. What will be left of us is what we will have become. If we allow ourselves to become more and more the living presence of love, then love will be precisely what we leave behind.

When people ask me if we will see our pets in heaven I say yes. God’s love makes our spirits immortal, and our love for our pets makes their spirits immortal.

Creatures die. Love does not. Let’s honor all the dead by touching all the living with tenderness and care and compassion.